

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 76 | Number 3 (Summer 2017)

pps. 343-345

Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism

Peter Hoehnle

ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

Hoehnle, Peter. "Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism." *The Annals of Iowa* 76 (2017), 343-345.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12408>

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Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism, by Chris Jennings. New York: Random House, 2016. xv, 488 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$28.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Peter Hoehnle is a former president of the Communal Studies Association and former editor of its journal, *Communal Studies*. He has written extensively (in this journal and elsewhere) about the Amana Colonies and other communal societies.

Paradise Now is an accessible introduction to five American utopian movements of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. It is of interest to students of Iowa history because of its treatment of the Fourierist movement, which influenced several small utopian communities in the state, and for its chapter on the Icarian movement, whose longest-lived communal incarnations were located near Corning, Iowa.

The subtitle of Jennings's book, "the story of American utopianism," is broad and misleading, as he limits his observations to five movements: the Shakers, Owenites, Fourierists, Icarians, and Oneida Perfectionists. Not included in this overview are any successful sectarian movements other than the Shakers. Thus, this is one survey of American communal societies that makes no mention at all of the Amana Society. Jennings focuses on communities that, in his view, attempted to reach out to the larger world in an effort at millenarian or utopian transformation. One could argue that the movements Jennings reviews are the most "utopian" in their focus and that others, including groups such as the Hutterites and the Amana Inspirationists, were not focused on being transformative but, rather, on maintaining a communal lifestyle based on their interpretation of biblical directives. One glaring omission in Jennings's work is at least a listing of other communities that would serve to broaden the context of American communalism.

A review of the bibliography reveals that Jennings's work is based primarily on secondary monographs. This is not a work of scholarship so much as an erudite, often witty digest of the work of others. Jennings's sources do represent the best published works on the movements discussed but include only a handful of journal articles and none from *Communal Societies*, the journal of the Communal Studies Association and the journal of record for this field.

Jennings's reliance on classic, if outdated, monographs leads him to perpetuate some old canards about the Shakers, in particular, that have been discounted by contemporary researchers. For example, the Shakers did not invent the clothespin, the flat broom, or the circular saw, nor did the Shakers peak at 6,000 members, as Jennings suggests. Jennings correctly identifies the future Shaker elder Frederick Evans as an ardent disciple of Robert Owen but incorrectly states that he was a resident of

Owen's New Harmony community. These and other errors are minor, however, and do not detract significantly from the value of Jennings's overview.

Jennings offers a commendable summary of the work of Charles Fourier and of the movements spawned by his thought, as translated through the writings and advocacy of his leading American disciple, Albert Brisbane. Jennings includes a lengthy account of the notable Brook Farm community of Roxbury, Massachusetts, which eventually fell under the spell of Fourierism and became a phalanx during the latter part of its brief existence. Because of his cogent discussion of Fourierism alone, I commend *Paradise Now* to anyone parsing the history of the Fourierist-influenced communities in Iowa. Although Jennings makes note of many of the 28 known Fourierist communities, he does not mention the Iowa Pioneer Phalanx, the one serious expression of the movement in the state, which existed in Mahaska County in 1844-1845.

Jennings's treatment of the Icarian movement is, likewise, accessible, accurate, and commendable to a reader with an Iowa focus. The Icarian movement began in the revolutionary fervor of 1830s France and was based on the writings of the French journalist, politician, and theorist Etienne Cabet, particularly his novel *Voyage en Icarie*, describing a visit to a fictional utopia. In 1848 Cabet dispatched an advance party of Icarian settlers to Texas to establish his model community. Drought, sickness, and poorly chosen land conspired to bring an early end to the Texas Icaria. The faithful regrouped in New Orleans and, under the guidance of the recently arrived Cabet, headed north, where they rented a portion of the abandoned Mormon settlement at Nauvoo. After Cabet's autocratic leadership led to divisions, the leader and a loyal faction settled near St. Louis in 1856, creating the short-lived Cheltenham community. A majority of the Icarians soon packed their belongings and moved to a 3,100-acre tract of land they owned in remote Adams County, Iowa. There, the French utopian socialists recreated their community of equality on the Iowa prairie. In 1878 divisions between members led to yet another fracture that, after legal wrangling, resulted in the creation of two communities, New Icaria and Young Icaria. The Young Icarians eventually removed to California, where they founded a short-lived community. The New Icarians, aging and largely dependent on hired labor, eventually dissolved their community in 1898.

Although Jennings devotes a lengthy chapter to Icaria, the Iowa period of the movement is summarized in a scant three pages. Jennings's purpose is not to provide a detailed social history of the Icarian communities in Adams County but rather to place them in context as the final expressions of the grand utopian vision articulated by Cabet. That

is entirely appropriate. Anyone wishing further detail on the Icarians is advised to read Robert Sutton's study, *Les Icaris: The Utopian Dream in Europe and America* (1994).

Jennings's work culminates in an interesting, complete, and largely error-free chapter on the Oneida Community, which flourished in up-state New York under the leadership of the enigmatic John Humphrey Noyes from the 1840s to the 1880s. This episode of utopian history is of interest to social historians but has limited relationship to the history of Iowa other than as a unique, if not spectacular, flowering of nineteenth-century utopianism and millennial anticipation.

Errors and omissions aside, *Paradise Now* is enjoyable, fresh, and a worthy introduction to American utopianism. It is not a complete history of utopianism in the United States, but it springs to the forefront of the books that I would recommend to anyone with even a passing interest in these movements or in the history of the early nineteenth century.

Sweet Freedom's Plains: African Americans on the Overland Trails, 1841–1869, by Shirley Ann Wilson Moore. Race and Culture in the American West Series. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016. xv, 368 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Reviewer J. T. Murphy is professor of history at Indiana University South Bend. His research and writing have focused on frontier settlement, the Oregon Trail, and the military history of the nineteenth-century U.S. West, among other topics.

On Christmas Day, 1849, Jacob Y. Stover and 26 other gold seekers from Iowa City stumbled into Rancho Cucamonga, a 13,000-acre cattle ranch and vineyard east of Los Angeles. They had traveled the overland trail to Salt Lake City, then taken the Old Spanish Trail over the desert into California. The ranch manager, an African American named Jackson, welcomed the visitors, fed them, and let them fill their tin cups with wine, which Stover remembered drinking "as fast as the Indians could tramp it," even though their host suggested moderation. "Gentlemen, you have had a hard time of it," he recalled Jackson saying, "but de first ting you know[,] you will know noting" (83). Despite his hospitality and apparent skill in managing a large ranching operation, Jackson had only a minor place in Stover's memory; he was simply part of a humorous interlude. This is one of many stories related by Shirley Ann Wilson Moore in her informative study of African American participation in the westward migrations. She wants us to recognize their presence and understand their significance; otherwise they will remain hidden from our collective memory.